

# Sea Legend 6.3 Gets A V-6 MerCruiser

One of Australia's most popular family cruisers, the Whittley 6.3 Sea Legend is now available with either a petrol or diesel sterndrive from either MerCruiser or Volvo Penta. Given the far reaching impact of the new high-tech outboards available to suit this class of cruiser, it was thought outboards would continue to be the most popular option - but Whittley's 6.3 m owners are going against the odds, and making a sterndrive their first choice.

Story & Pics by Peter Webster.



'Write-ups' consist of criticism-free reports about new boats "written-up" by professional PR writers employed by the boatbuilder. Or the F&B team, when time doesn't permit a formal test, or the test was conducted interstate without our full test equipment. Or maybe the boat is just an upgrade of an earlier model we've tested in-depth.

WRITE-UPS

## Whittley Sea Legend 6.3 m Sterndrive

When we first tested the Whittley Sea Legend (August 1997 F&B #28) we were very impressed, and not surprised when the Sea Legend 6.3 went on to win one of the 1998 Boat of the Year Awards.

Originally designed in New Zealand, the Sea Legend moulds have been adapted and modified extensively for Australian usage by one of Australia's best known boat building families, the Whittley family based in Melbourne, Victoria.

Whittley's have been known for many years for their very fine trailerboat cruising craft. So much so, it's generally believed they have a "mortgage" on the cruising section of the trailerboat market. With good reason, too. Whittley's are renowned for their beautiful finish and excellent performance, and they command one of the highest levels of on-going resale of any fibreglass trailerboat in Australia.

However, with the move to a new and substantially bigger factory recently, and the desire to diversify some of their talent into fishing-oriented craft, the Whittley's looked

around for a series of boats they could introduce to tap into the lucrative GRP fishing market. They found the answer in the 'land of the long white cloud', and established a close rapport between a New Zealand boatbuilder and themselves.

In all, they obtained the rights and moulds to three of the Sea Legend models, being the 5.0 m, 6.3 m and 7.3 m.

As it has transpired, the 6.3 Sea Legend has really kicked a goal, proving to be one of the most popular boats in the whole Whittley line-up. With the release of this sterndrive equipped version, it will undoubtedly be even more popular in the future.

**The Sterndrive:** In one of the tightest "fits" the writer has ever seen, the Whittley team shoe-horned a 4.3 litre MerCruiser EFI V-6 engine into a remarkably small space on the transom of the 6.3 Sea Legend. The 4.3 L EFI is a near perfect power choice for this craft.

With 210 very willing horsepower on tap at the propeller, the Sea Legend 6.3 really gets up and boogies, but still turns in terrific fuel consumption. It is about 50% less than most carburetted V-6, 2-stroke outboards, regardless of who makes them.

This boat has a beautiful cruising speed of 23-24 knots at just on 3000 r/min, at which point, the engine is ticking over with its electronically controlled fuel injectors using between 22 and 23 litres of fuel every hour, and delivering 4.0-4.5 (nautical) miles per gallon. For a substantial 6.3 (21') cruiser, these are extremely good figures.

Better still, if the new owners are figuring on a little trolling, the EFI will beat any carburetted V-6 hands down, to the extent that it could be using as little as one third of the fuel!

At 2000 r/min, for example, this engine is only using between 12-13 L/ph. Given the 165 L fuel tank, suggests a cruising range of no less than 160-170 nm can be expected running the boat at around 23-24 knots.

When you consider these figures, it's no wonder 9 out of 10 Whittley 6.3 Sea Legend buyers are now choosing to install the V-6 EFI MerCruiser instead of an outboard motor.

Just how the new, bigger 4-stroke outboards will impact on that decision remains to be seen, but I would think the 130 hp Honda would also be a clever match for this boat.

Later on, it would be fascinating to put together a 6.3 Sea Legend with the 210 hp MerCruiser head to head

with a 130 hp Honda.

Boating consumers have never had such a wonderful choice of engines as they have at the moment, and the choice seems to be getting better on an almost daily basis.

**Performance:** As you would expect, with 210 hp bolted in front of the transom, the Sea Legend 6.3 leaped out of the "hole" like a startled rabbit, and rocketed through the traps at 40.2 knots, making this a seriously quick little cruiser! Buttoned off a little, running at 4000 revs produced an exciting 36.1 knots, and even backed off to 3000 revs, it still put away 23.2 nm in every hour.

Handling too is improved, because the entire mass of the sterndrive engine block is located well ahead of the transom, and much lower down than a bigger V-6 type outboard. The result is a significant improvement in handling, which in the case of the Sea Legend was pretty hard to do, because it's already one of the better handling boats on the market.

But you can make a good thing better, and the Whittley's have done that here with the sterndrive model.

**Downside:** There is some downside to the sterndrive installation which will effect NSW readers in particular. A

very cursory look at the weights will show that the sterndrive version is around 218 kgs heavier just in the engine room, when the weight of the previously tested V-6 Ocean Runner outboard (170.5 kg) is compared to this 210 hp V-6 MerCruiser (388 kg including the leg).

The Whittley's now believe the boat, motor and trailer (BMT) weight of the sterndrive model is up to 1.8-1.9 tonnes depending on the final fit-out and equipment installed, and that needs to be carefully thought about for NSW readers.

For most other states of Australia, towing a boat like this (at around the 2 tonne mark) with a well fitted LandCruiser, Pajero, Jackaroo (etc) is no problem at all. With a modern trailer from Dunbier, Tinka or Mackay, this boat can be easily trailered in complete safety with a minimum of fuss.

The only other disadvantage that I could see with the sterndrive model concerned the noise level. I was a little disappointed at the figures we recorded. They tended to highlight that because this engine has been shoe-horned into such a tiny space, it has to rely on the natural sound absorbing qualities of the GRP covers to contain the engine noise.

I suspect a little bit more "air"

around the engine, plus sufficient space for an appropriate layer of lead-lined sound insulation material would have markedly reduced the noise coming through the engine box and made this whole package quieter and more pleasant to work with.

**Cost:** If you buy this boat from Northside Marine at Sandgate, Brisbane or any other of the major Whittley players in their dealer network, expect to pay around \$58,600 depending on the fit-out and the options you require.

Whittley's fit their boats out beautifully, so although the price might seem a little high initially, don't pre-judge them until you've seen the inventory and fitting-out list, because Whittley's install thousands of dollars worth of gear and equipment that are usually optional extras on other boats or not available at all.

For further information, please call Northside Marine, (07) 3269 0011  
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